

Christian Right's Political Spats Spur Growth of 'Nones'

What, if any, relationship exists between the Christian Right's public conflicts over policies and the growth of "nones" (people claiming no religious affiliation) in the U.S.?

That question was the focus of research conducted by Paul A. Djupe, Denison University; Jacob R. Neiheisel, University at Buffalo; and Kimberly H. Conger, University of Cincinnati. Their research appeared in an April 26 article in *Political Research Quarterly*, a publication of the University of Utah.

The study sought to test and further analyze the [conclusion](#) of researchers Michael Hout, New York University, and Claude S. Fischer, University of California, Berkeley, who have asserted that there is a direct link between the rise of the Christian or Religious Right and the increase of "nones."

While noting that the Religious Right's influence has waned nationwide, Djupe, Neiheisel and Conger suggested that "enough pockets of influence and activism exist in the states that continued attention to the movement is worthwhile."

Multiple data sets from both state and national surveys (with a specific focus on state-level data) from 2000 to 2016, along with insight from political observers about Religious Right political initiatives, were analyzed by the researchers to look for correlations between the growth of "nones" and the Christian or Religious Right's presence and influence.

"The rate of change is uneven across the states, driven by the salient policy controversy linked to Christian Right activism," they found, with a principle "salient policy controversy" being efforts to pass same-sex marriage bans beginning in 2004.

A majority (29) of U.S. states had same-sex marriage bans by 2010, a six-year period that also saw a significant increase in the number of “nones” in the largely evangelical states with these bans.

“Christian Right influence in state politics seems to negatively affect religion, such that religious attachments fade in the face of visible Christian Right policy victories,” the researchers concluded. “When intermittently visible, there is clear evidence that people, and probably those without strong relationships with houses of worship, use the Christian Right as a proxy for religion as a whole and discontinue their religious identities as a result.”

This trend, they said, was comparable to what took place in the 1960s and '70s when “religious leaders from more liberal, mainline Protestant denominations [took] positions on the pressing issues of the day, often (from the perspective of organizational maintenance, at least) to disastrous effect.”

The full report is available [here](#).